



MOANA and a Perfect Day in Hollywood

One of my favorite places to be is a movie theatre and one of my favorite memories of going to a movie theatre was when I saw Disney's **MOANA** eight years ago this week. I was newly single, a novel experience for me at the time, and I was eager to find ways to connect with people. I had a co-worker named Jayde who was one of my favorite people to talk with.

I remember her excitement the day she showed me the new tattoo. She had a dog who'd recently passed so she put his pawprint on her wrist. She had to keep it covered at work because our company didn't allow visible tattoos back then. Still, throughout the shift, I could see her happily and probably absent-mindedly running her hand along the stretch band she wore to cover her new ink.

I also remember she introduced me to the music of Regina Spektor, who is still one of my absolute favorite artists. SAMSON was her favorite of Spektor's songs.

Well, when the newest Disney movie arrived near the end of 2016, Jayde was the person I most wanted to see it with. She spoke frequently about spending time with her mother, and she'd introduced us once at a work event, so I offered to take both of them to see **MOANA** at El Capitan, the Disney Theatre in Hollywood. My goal was to make Jayde comfortable by

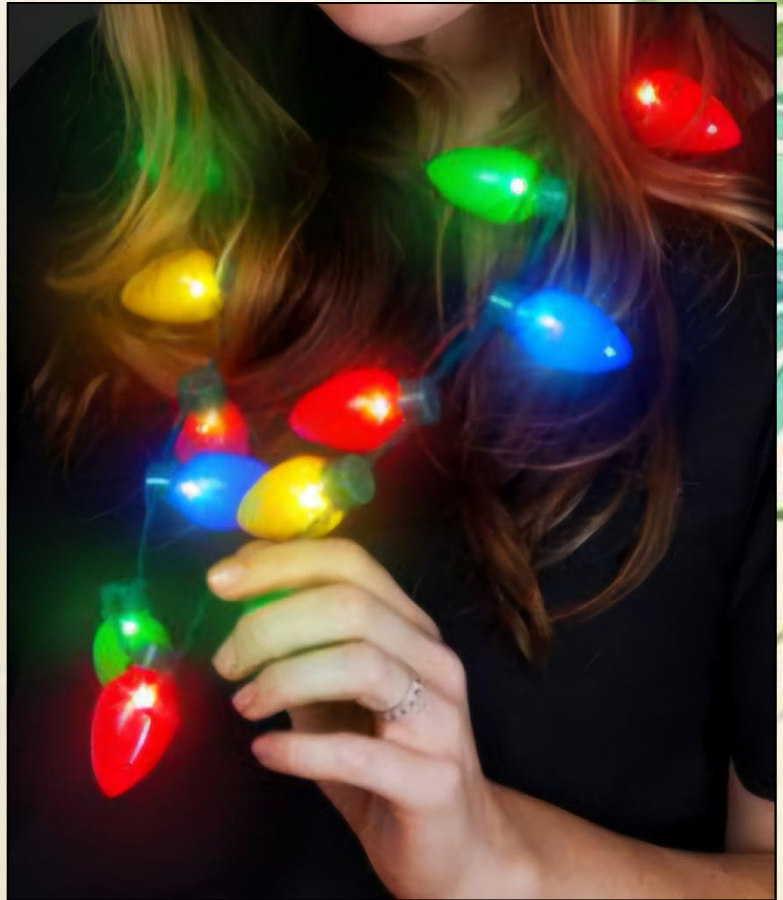
having someone else around. I wanted to remove any pressure that might be associated with going on a "date." I wasn't really trying to build a romance, I just wanted to see a movie with a friend I really enjoyed. Evidently, inviting her mom was the right approach.

Jayde said Yes.



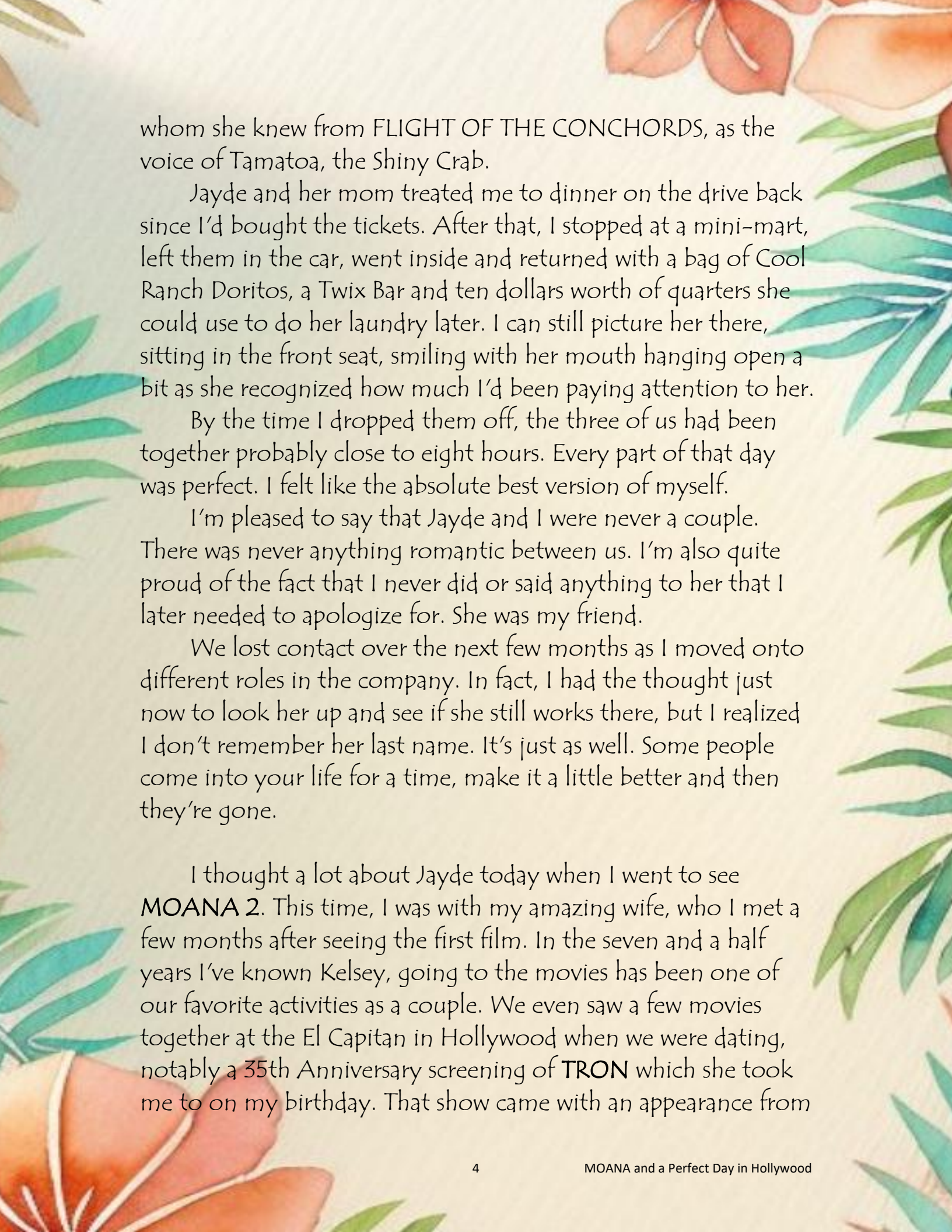
We usually worked evenings together and I frequently drove her home at the end of our shift. A few nights before the show, we were walking to the car when she saw a display of necklaces shaped like strands of Christmas lights. She was debating about buying one, but fortunately, she decided not to. I went back the next morning and bought two. When I arrived to pick the ladies up, there was a necklace waiting on each of their seats, (And of course I had the car deep-cleaned.)

The ride was about an hour long, plenty of time to talk about plans for the holiday and the approaching New Year, and even for the coming week. Jayde mentioned needing to get quarters so she'd be able to use the laundromat in her apartment complex. After that, I made sure to ask, as casually as I could, her favorite snack food (Cool Ranch Doritos) and her favorite candy (Twix bars.) This girl had PHENOMENAL taste!



Our tickets came with commemorative popcorn buckets, and I'd gotten us seats in the front row of the balcony. Jayde was positively mesmerized by the size of the theatre and the intricate designs on the walls. She was leaning against the railing, taking it all in, when I tossed a single piece of popcorn down onto the seats below us. I immediately leaned back in my seat so when the guests below us looked up, all they saw was her leaning over them. She was deeply embarrassed but she was also laughing... exactly the response I'd hoped for.

A live Moana performer took the stage before the film and did an amazing Polynesian dance to some of the soundtrack we were about to hear. The movie itself was so delightful. I remember Jayde was particularly thrilled with Jermaine Clement,



whom she knew from FLIGHT OF THE CONCHORDS, as the voice of Tamatoa, the Shiny Crab.

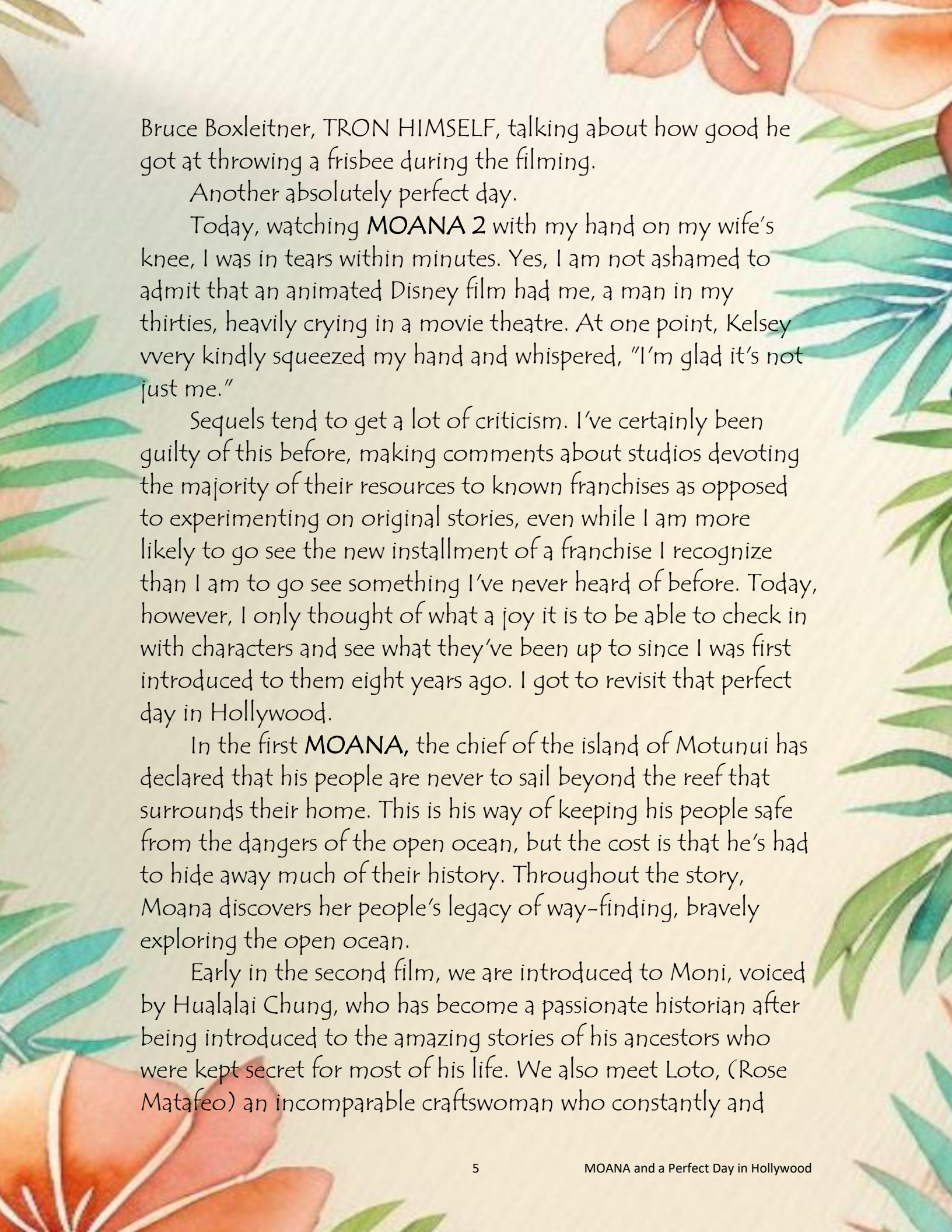
Jayde and her mom treated me to dinner on the drive back since I'd bought the tickets. After that, I stopped at a mini-mart, left them in the car, went inside and returned with a bag of Cool Ranch Doritos, a Twix Bar and ten dollars worth of quarters she could use to do her laundry later. I can still picture her there, sitting in the front seat, smiling with her mouth hanging open a bit as she recognized how much I'd been paying attention to her.

By the time I dropped them off, the three of us had been together probably close to eight hours. Every part of that day was perfect. I felt like the absolute best version of myself.

I'm pleased to say that Jayde and I were never a couple. There was never anything romantic between us. I'm also quite proud of the fact that I never did or said anything to her that I later needed to apologize for. She was my friend.

We lost contact over the next few months as I moved onto different roles in the company. In fact, I had the thought just now to look her up and see if she still works there, but I realized I don't remember her last name. It's just as well. Some people come into your life for a time, make it a little better and then they're gone.

I thought a lot about Jayde today when I went to see **MOANA 2**. This time, I was with my amazing wife, who I met a few months after seeing the first film. In the seven and a half years I've known Kelsey, going to the movies has been one of our favorite activities as a couple. We even saw a few movies together at the El Capitan in Hollywood when we were dating, notably a 35th Anniversary screening of **TRON** which she took me to on my birthday. That show came with an appearance from



Bruce Boxleitner, TRON HIMSELF, talking about how good he got at throwing a frisbee during the filming.

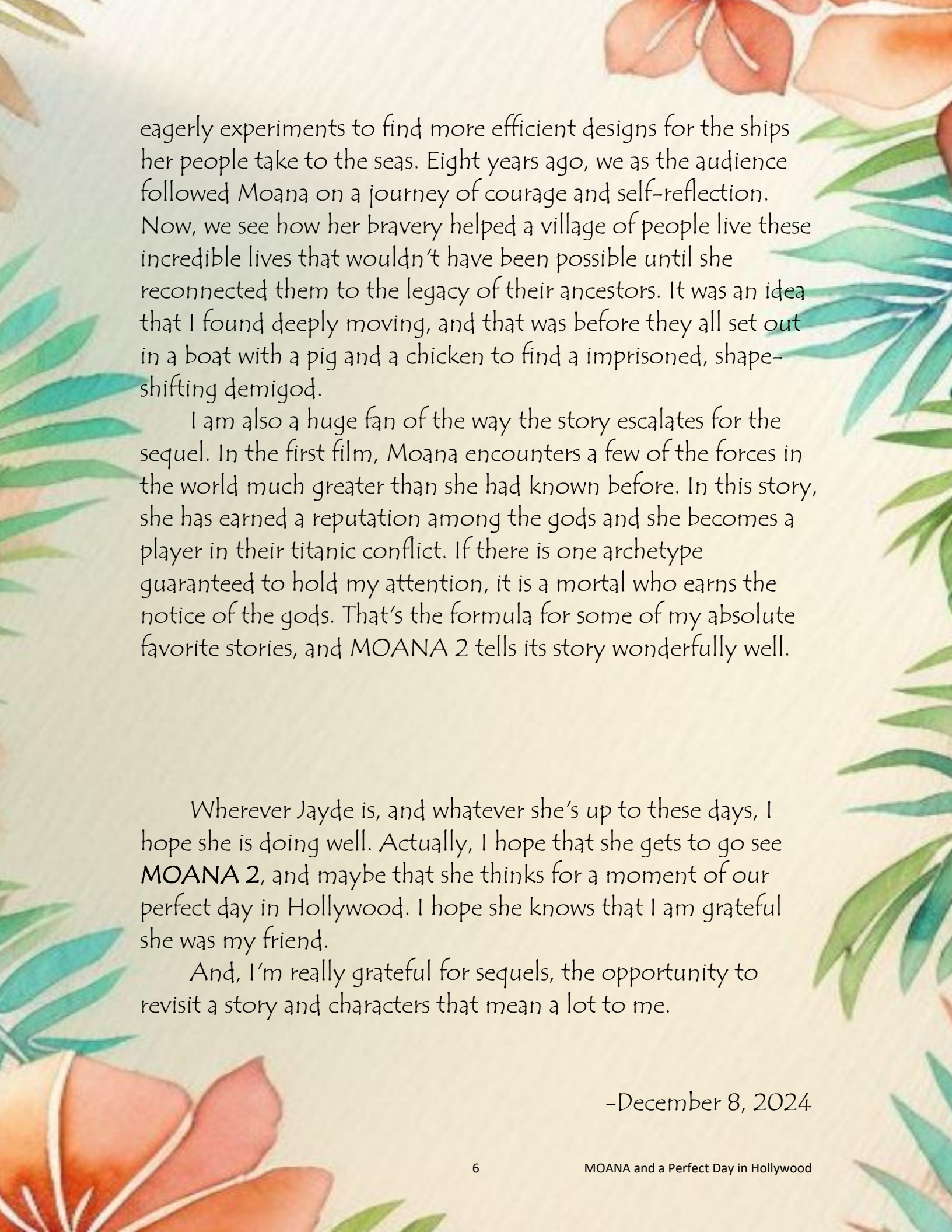
Another absolutely perfect day.

Today, watching **MOANA 2** with my hand on my wife's knee, I was in tears within minutes. Yes, I am not ashamed to admit that an animated Disney film had me, a man in my thirties, heavily crying in a movie theatre. At one point, Kelsey very kindly squeezed my hand and whispered, "I'm glad it's not just me."

Sequels tend to get a lot of criticism. I've certainly been guilty of this before, making comments about studios devoting the majority of their resources to known franchises as opposed to experimenting on original stories, even while I am more likely to go see the new installment of a franchise I recognize than I am to go see something I've never heard of before. Today, however, I only thought of what a joy it is to be able to check in with characters and see what they've been up to since I was first introduced to them eight years ago. I got to revisit that perfect day in Hollywood.

In the first **MOANA**, the chief of the island of Motunui has declared that his people are never to sail beyond the reef that surrounds their home. This is his way of keeping his people safe from the dangers of the open ocean, but the cost is that he's had to hide away much of their history. Throughout the story, Moana discovers her people's legacy of way-finding, bravely exploring the open ocean.

Early in the second film, we are introduced to Moni, voiced by Hualalai Chung, who has become a passionate historian after being introduced to the amazing stories of his ancestors who were kept secret for most of his life. We also meet Loto, (Rose Matafeo) an incomparable craftswoman who constantly and



eagerly experiments to find more efficient designs for the ships her people take to the seas. Eight years ago, we as the audience followed Moana on a journey of courage and self-reflection. Now, we see how her bravery helped a village of people live these incredible lives that wouldn't have been possible until she reconnected them to the legacy of their ancestors. It was an idea that I found deeply moving, and that was before they all set out in a boat with a pig and a chicken to find a imprisoned, shape-shifting demigod.

I am also a huge fan of the way the story escalates for the sequel. In the first film, Moana encounters a few of the forces in the world much greater than she had known before. In this story, she has earned a reputation among the gods and she becomes a player in their titanic conflict. If there is one archetype guaranteed to hold my attention, it is a mortal who earns the notice of the gods. That's the formula for some of my absolute favorite stories, and MOANA 2 tells its story wonderfully well.

Wherever Jayde is, and whatever she's up to these days, I hope she is doing well. Actually, I hope that she gets to go see **MOANA 2**, and maybe that she thinks for a moment of our perfect day in Hollywood. I hope she knows that I am grateful she was my friend.

And, I'm really grateful for sequels, the opportunity to revisit a story and characters that mean a lot to me.

-December 8, 2024